



Contact: IBHE [Melissa Hahn](#) 217-441-1066

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**ILLINOIS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION AWARDS \$1.3 MILLION TO COLLEGES  
AND UNIVERSITIES TO STRENGTHEN AND DIVERSIFY THE EARLY CHILDHOOD  
WORKFORCE**

*Grants awarded to Joliet Junior College, Lewis University, National Louis  
University, Quincy University, and Western Illinois University*

**SPRINGFIELD** – The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) announced today it will award \$1.3 million in grants to five Illinois colleges and universities to strengthen and diversify the early childhood workforce pipeline. The grants, funded by the federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) initiative, are awarded in partnership with the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD). The funds will support an estimated 150 students in the upcoming academic year.

Ginger Ostro, executive director, IBHE, said "This is just another example of how IBHE is partnering with GOECD and the Pritzker Administration to show its commitment to education and dedication to equity. These grants will move the ball forward by increasing the education levels of teachers and assistants, lead to more diversity in our early childhood classrooms where underrepresented students need it, and benefit the workforce in future years."

Dr. Jamilah R. Jor'dan, Acting Executive Director of GOECD, said, "Now more than ever, it's important that we invest in attracting and retaining a diverse workforce. Research indicates that a diverse teaching workforce benefits the entire school community, especially children of color. Further, early childhood educators of color face varied challenges accessing higher education opportunities and face significant wage disparities. The time to invest in the workforce is now."

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After receiving proposals from colleges and universities around the state, IBHE has selected five to implement the grant. The institutions are:

- Joliet Junior College
- Lewis University
- National Louis University
- Quincy University
- Western Illinois University

Each institution will implement innovative programs designed to address the shortage of early childhood educators in Illinois and the need to support educators who represent the communities they serve. Three of the five institutions will include a focus on supporting early childhood educators in rural settings, three will include a focus on supporting infant-toddler teachers, and three will focus specifically on supporting educators of color.

Funds will be used by colleges and universities to help early educators attain one or more state-recognized credentials or a degree. Awarded programs will test innovations such as compressed course schedules, assessments of prior learning, job-embedded coaching or mentoring, hybrid online courses, and professional learning communities. Illinois has a history of institution-led programs of tailored supports for early childhood educators, and evaluations have demonstrated that they can be helpful for current early childhood educators pursuing degrees or credentials to improve their practice.

Grants will run through the 2020-21 academic year; similar funding opportunities may be made available in the coming years.

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